Bluebeard's Wife

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Bluebeard's Wife

by dancey94

Summary

Hannibal and Bedelia are a married Alpha couple and the envy of all of high society Florence, though their relationship behind closed doors is anything but conventional. One night, during a walk, Hannibal finds a man on the street, whom he offers help and who soon becomes a source of distraction for everyone.

Based on the prompt in this post; don't click if You don't want to be spoiled

Chapter 1

Almost a hundred of couples were spinning around, shaped like the blades of a windmill, as the music wafted in the air of the hall. The two guards at the door were allowed only a glimpse of the high society party time. It didn't look like anything else they had seen. The women's dresses were long, made of expensive and exotic fabrics; some were covered with diamonds, rubies and other gemstones. If a dress looked simple, then the lady wore lavishing jewellery on her neck, ears and wrists. The men were wearing suits and mostly bowties. The diversity between them was a little less visible but it was easily noticeable who among the crowd, and who in a couple, was not an Alpha.

The ball was organised as an introduction into the mating season and it was mostly Alphas who participated. Majority of the couples were consisting of two stronger personalities but there were also some rich individuals, who preferred dominance and the company of Omegas. That evening was a gift for them, as in the middle of the ball a few very rare, attractive and trained Omegas would be introduced. Not only single Alphas enjoyed the show that was due. It was a form of entertainment all Alphas loved and would take part in the ball even if for the sole purpose of catching a glimpse of unclaimed and wonderfully submissive Omegas.

As the music went on, the couples continued dragging on the floor. The orchestra gave a scintillating performance and everyone seemed enchanted by the talent of the musicians. It was surprisingly rare that the orchestra reached such perfect synchronization.

A few people gathered near the dancing couples and observed. It was another form of entertainment – watching others dance and waiting for someone to make a mistake, step on a partner or fall disgracefully. It wasn't a frequent occurrence, mostly because the rich people were trained to dance and paid for their Omega partners to be as educated in the art as they were. However, among the people were also some particularly talented and working in tandem perfectly. They, too, pleased the eye.

One of the men lifted his arm a bit, allowing his lady to turn, and then effortlessly led the dance on. He was aware of the eyes on him and his stunning partner, and could imagine all the rumours and comments spreading over the hall. No one was particularly sneaky or shy about their admiration for the couple. It was the charm and power that emanated from their every move.

By the end of the musical number, the man tilted slightly, letting the lady turn and bend over his knee, exposing her long slim neck. He supported her with his strong arms and it was apparent that she trusted him to no limit.

The last bow slid over the violin and the man helped the lady up. They looked at each other, seemingly proud of themselves and comfortable in each other's presence. A short smile ghosted on his lips before he uttered "Bellissima". Her eyes were focused solely on his face, registering the slightest twitch of lips or cheek muscle, as she responded "Grazie".

A waiter passed them, and the man took a glass of champagne, offering it to his lady, who shook her head in the gentlest way possible, but he understood and took the glass for himself.

The people kept talking, chatting and whispering, shocked when a more bold man approached the couple.

“Mrs Du Maurier.” The man uttered as he bent down to kiss the lady’s hand. She looked at him politely and then challenged his gaze. “Mr Lecter.” The man added as he glanced at the lady’s partner.

Lecter nodded politely at the man and waited for the conversation to unfold. He was curious what the man’s business was but he was not going to help in whatever he wanted to achieve.

“I am new in this circle, as you might have noticed, but I hear you are worthy of attention. The people I talked to are astonished by your work. I heard your language is admirable.”

“Thank you.” Lecter replied politely.

“Still, you’re a straniero.” The man added.

A second of silence followed as the man expected a response. He might have hoped to make Lecter angry and reckless, show his true nature, but it never happened. The man remained calm and awaited the next words.

“I am not driven by prejudices, therefore I am not quick to reject or dislike someone. I am more than willing to have a sample of your talent in reciting and I hope we can become friends. After all, we have a lot in common.”

“Oh?” It was seemingly difficult for Lecter to hide his amusement and annoyance. Thankfully, it was now time for the show to begin, as an impeccably dressed man appeared in the middle of the hall and was about to introduce the Omegas for the evening.

“Well, if you excuse us, my wife and I would like to see this year’s debuting Omegas. Have a nice rest of the evening, mister… Excuse me but I can’t I remember your name.”

“Chilton. Doctor Frederick Chilton. I am trained in psychiatry.”

“What a coincidence. Psychiatry is my husband’s hobby.” Du Maurier commented.

“Excuse me, my lady, but psychiatry cannot be a hobby. It’s a very profound field in medicine.” Chilton explained.

“Of course. I meant that he’s very interested in the field.” Du Maurier corrected and took Lecter’s arm. The couple turned to take seats.

Everyone was getting comfortable in their chairs set around in a circle so that everyone had a good view of the presented Omegas. Lecter threw one glance at the spot where Chilton was sitting to make sure it was in a safe distance.

The host of the ball asked for silence and started the show. One by one, he was introducing the Omegas who had been trained and kept to that day, to be sold to participating Alphas.

There were ten of the Omegas, all of them attractive, slim and obviously submissive. There were four women and six men in the group and after being introduced, one by one, they remained standing in the hall. That way, gathered people could look, assess, count their money, re-evaluate their life choices, and finally decide on bringing one of the rare Omegas home.

Lecter and his wife indulged in watching the Omegas make themselves look tempting and promising, as they talked about the least important issues, such as what kind of wine Lecter wanted for the dinner the next day. It was Du Maurier's duty to provide the ingredients for the meals that Lecter made himself. Apart from psychiatry, cooking was another of his great hobbies and passions.

The show appeared quite boring to them and the Omegas not very alluring. The women were too thin for their taste and the men resembled females in their gestures and way of mowing, which was not exactly a bad thing but something that neither Lecter nor his lady were looking for that evening.

They left the party quite early, even though both of them knew that their home was not a way to escape boredom.

When Lecter closed the door behind them, it was obvious he was tired and slightly angry.

"That man, Chilton, is not a threat to us." Du Maurier reassured as she took off her heels, although the words were directed mostly to herself.

"I know he's not a threat. He's a moron." Lecter explained and went to the living room. He opened a cabinet and took out a bottle of whiskey.

"Then what-" Du Maurier entered the living room and upon seeing Lecter with a drink in hand, stopped short. Her face expression was one of resentment and distaste.

"Don't look at me like that." He said simply and gulped the drink.

"How am I looking at you?"

"Do you really want to make me angry right now?"

"No." She replied and moved past him. "Would you?" She pointed at the zipper in her dress.

He helped her with the zipper, moving it down to the small of her back, where she could reach it herself. Du Maurier went to the bathroom and started the water for a bath, checking the temperature with her wrist, as Lecter poured himself another drink and stood in the threshold to watch his wife.

"How do you feel today?" She asked softly.

"How do *you* feel today?"

Du Maurier stepped out of the dress, remaining completely naked, with her back turned to her husband.

“After all those years, I still have no idea how to do this.” She confessed and stepped into the bath. Her neck landed softly on the edge of the bath and she put her arms along the two parallel edges.

“It never bothered you, Bedelia. Why should it start now?”

“It still doesn’t bother me. I’m only astound by our acting skills.”

Lecter stood in the doorway a moment longer, lost in thought, and then left, allowing his wife some peace and privacy. It was a warm night and the city was not yet fully asleep, as if it ever was. Lecter grabbed a pen and paper and after scribbling a short note, he left the apartment.

During his walk, he spotted an acquaintance with a newly acquired Omega, who didn’t seem as submissive anymore as he did when on the spotlight. Lecter did not indulge in any conversations. Whomever he passed, he left with a simple wish of goodnight and moved on.

Without noticing, Lecter walked a bit more than initially intended. He crossed the street when a particularly needy and pushy Omega prostitute tried to get Lecter into bed. The walk was supposed to make him relaxed and detached but he felt still on edge. And his next discovery wasn’t helpful.

There was a faint voice coming from an alley nearby and when Hannibal moved past it, he spotted someone crouching by the wall of a building. A beam of light from a streetlamp reached the person and Lecter could see it was a man. Moreover, he appeared to have been beaten up. It wasn’t particularly strange and Lecter was about to leave the man and go back home, when the next groan from the man made his heart weak. Only then did he realise he could smell a faint scent that resembled the air after a storm. It was fresh and exciting and odd as it had not been raining.

Lecter decided he couldn’t abandon a person in need. The least he could do was call an ambulance. He approached the man in the alley and crouched by him, trying to get the man to look at him.

“Can you hear me? How many fingers do you see?” Lecter asked and finally, when the man lifted his head, caught a glimpse of a quite handsome face.

“Three and yes, I can hear you.” The man uttered, not without effort but tried to look casual, even with the bruises covering his face.

Lecter took out his phone but before he could dial any number, the man caught his wrist to stop him.

“Don’t call an ambulance. Or the police.” His voice was harsh but there was plea in his eyes.

The request made Lecter narrow his eyes and smirk. Suddenly, that evening and that man seemed interesting. A little adrenaline to end a boring day full of pretending.

“Can I help you otherwise?” Lecter asked.

“Probably not. Unless you can take me home, offer some food and a place to sleep. At least for tonight.”

The words were not serious, not really, as the man was aware of how hopeless that plea would be. But Lecter felt generous and excited. He took a careful look at the man before him and assessed him – a handsome face, expressive eyes, dark worn-out suit and bruises all over. The man was thin, very thin; that much could be told even without the man having to stand up straight. Malnutrition was the diagnosis Lecter formed in his head, and offered a hand for the man to take.

A frown appeared on the man’s face but he took the hand and stood up with one more groan. He was beaten up severely but endured the pain he must have felt.

“What is your name?” Lecter asked and reached for his phone again. Seeing the man withdraw slightly, he felt the need to explain. “I’m calling a taxi. I live a few minutes away and you don’t seem able to walk that far. Or do you want to stay here?”

“No, I… Will. Graham.” The man finally introduced himself.

“My name is Hannibal Lecter. I work as a curator in the Palazzo Capponi.”

Chapter 2

When they reached the apartment, Lecter's wife was already asleep and all the lights were off. Hannibal led the way to the living room but then decided they needed to get to the bathroom.

"I need you to sit here." Lecter pointed at a chair in the bathroom and opened a cabinet. He took out hydrogen peroxide, a gaze and some painkillers. He also started a bath for the man.

"I know I asked for this but you are being very polite and generous and I can't help but being suspicious." Will said, while he took off his jacket and put it on the back of the chair.

"It's a little too late to start questioning my actions and intentions, don't you think?" Hannibal asked with a smile. Indeed, if his intentions were bad and aiming at hurting Will, there was no use in pointing it out at that moment.

"It is but I hoped you would tell me more about yourself, for example, is it usual for you to rescue starving Omegas you find on the streets?"

Upon hearing the name, Hannibal looked at Will and frowned slightly. Omega, yes. That was obvious – the scent and being left alone on the street. But it was only at that moment when the realisation fully dawned on Lecter. He had invited an Omega to his home. A complete stranger, a male, very handsome one to that.

"Don't tell me you didn't know." Will said and Hannibal knew he was silent, processing the situation, for a bit longer than he thought.

"I don't usually walk around and save people, no. Call it boredom or selfish satisfaction but at least you are here now, safe. I can help you with your bruises," Hannibal brushed one of Will's wound with a gaze, "offer you a glass of whiskey, a bed to sleep, and tomorrow we can part if you wish."

Graham seemed to appreciate the tender way with which Hannibal treated his bruises, and lowered his eyelids slightly. The offer sounded amazing and Will was in no position really to decline. That was what he asked for, and more. He nodded.

"I will leave you now. Have a bath and I will pour us both a drink. I'll look for a pair of pyjamas for you for the night." Hannibal added after glancing at Will one more time, and left the bathroom.

The air was getting chilly so Lecter closed the windows in the living room. He wondered if his wife would wake up at the sounds of him and Will in the apartment. If not, a surprise would welcome her the next morning.

Hannibal was happy to enter their guest room. He had decorated it himself but never really spent time there. It was a room only for other people, who would come to visit. Even after a

heated argument, Hannibal would not go and sleep there; he would always sleep in his bed with his wife.

The bed in the guest room was not as huge as the master bed but still large enough for two people. For a man found on the street that must have been luxury.

Hannibal opened a drawer and took out a pair of brand new pyjamas. He placed it on a small table by the door to the bathroom as he walked to get some glasses for the whiskey. The drinks were waiting on the coffee table in the living room. When Lecter heard only silence coming from the bathroom, he knocked gently on the door.

“Are you alright? Can I come in? I have pyjamas for you.”

“I’m fine. Come in.”

As much a cliché it was, Hannibal knew he would never forget the sight that welcomed him upon opening the door.

There was a strange man in his bathroom, wrapped in one of Hannibal’s towels. With wet hair and still dripping torso, the man was a magnificent vision, taken straight from a magazine for women. Even with his too thin body, Will worked like a magnet.

At that thought, Hannibal smiled. Of course Will was a magnet for him – he was an Omega. It was just that Hannibal was rarely in company of Omegas and he never quite felt what was described in books and magazines, he never felt that compelling attraction and sudden need for anyone of the sort. His wife being an Alpha was also an impact on his senses. However, at that moment, Lecter wondered if there was more than a simple sympathy and boredom that made him take Will home.

“Here.” Lecter handed his quest the pair of pyjamas and with one more longer glance, he examined the bruises on Will’s chest. Nothing he would die from.

Hannibal left the bathroom and sat in the living room, looking at the drink before him. He waited for Will exactly two minutes.

Graham acted a bit shy, pretending not to know if he should take a seat next to his saviour, until Hannibal patted the place next to him on the couch. Lecter raised both glasses and handed one to Graham, giving him permission to drink. It worked like magic – Hannibal had the sense of being a master in his house, a dominant in a truly non-existent relationship. What was more, he felt as if he knew Will for quite a long time, like they were friends.

The man gulped the drink and waited. It was after two in the morning and Hannibal was starting to get tired. He poured them one more drink and, when they emptied their glasses, he showed Will the guest room and wished him good night.

“Aren’t you even a bit afraid I may steal something?” Graham asked with a smirk just before Hannibal left the room.

“Everything is insured and… No, I’m not afraid of you.”

Hannibal went to his bedroom and lay down next to his wife. He closed his eyes but couldn't fall asleep, not with the adrenaline still running in his veins, not with the image of Will in his towel still on his mind. It took him a few minutes before he finally fell asleep.

Sunday mornings were usually filled with the discussions of the next week, the events they needed to attend and people they had to see. Du Maurier also took it upon herself to sum up and evaluate the previous week. It was a cold reckoning.

That Sunday morning, however, started with a dull thud coming from the living room. Hannibal woke up and noticed the place beside him was empty. Without hesitation but also without haste, Lecter left the bedroom and saw Will lying on the floor and his wife standing over the man's body with a marble statue in her hand.

Blood left Hannibal's face and he knelt by his quest. He checked the pulse and sighed with relief upon discovering Will was still alive. Lecter lifted Will's body and laid the man on the couch.

"Care to explain?" Du Maurier asked, signs of shock still on her face.

"I know him." Hannibal stated calmly.

"I thought all our acquaintances were mutual. And that I would be familiar with people who you invite to our apartment."

"I met him yesterday. There was no time for introductions."

"You met him yesterday and felt it proper to ask him to stay for the night?" Du Maurier was getting more and more angry but it was only her voice and eyes that betrayed that.

"I felt… compelled to help him."

"Of course you did. He's an Omega. I could sense it before I woke up."

"Then why didn't you wake me up?"

"You still smell of alcohol and a burglar is nothing I cannot deal with myself."

Hannibal nodded, knowing that it was true; his wife could manage on her own pretty well.

"I need to change. I'm seeing Alana for breakfast." Du Maurier stated and moved to the bedroom. Before she reached the door, she stopped short. "I want him gone by noon." She pointed at Will. "And then, please, have a look at that manuscript I gave you. It's important."

"Of course."

The woman disappeared in the bedroom and Hannibal looked at Will. There was going to be one more bruise on his head, and a bump. A collection of scars that man was. And Lecter already felt impressed with all of them. He wanted to know every story.

Hannibal brought a first aid kit and took care of Will. Meanwhile, Bedelia changed, threw an annoyed look at Hannibal, and left.

It took Graham half an hour to regain consciousness. He woke with a start and looked around, registering his surroundings.

“You’re safe.” Hannibal assured him, bringing him a cup of coffee and placing it on the coffee table.

“Safe? Someone attacked me.”

“Yes. My wife thought you were a burglar.”

“Your wife?” Will seemed more and more surprised with every word coming out of Hannibal’s mouth.

“She was asleep when we got here and I didn’t want to wake her up to explain so when she woke up this morning and… heard you, she assumed you were a burglar.” Hannibal explained, trying to avoid admitting that they sensed, very acutely at that point, that Will was an Omega.

“I didn’t know…” Will touched the spot where Bedelia hit him with a statue and grunted. “I should leave.”

“Maybe you should. But do you want to?” Hannibal asked teasingly and sipped his coffee.

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know your story but yesterday I found you on the street, beaten up and starving. Are you sure you want to go back there?”

“There is not much I can do about that. You already showed me much generosity and I cannot really ask for more.”

“Can’t you? Try me.”

Hannibal was holding the cup in his hands, the other was waiting on the table for Will to take. The man looked at it, then at his saviour and smiled. His big blue eyes expressed gratitude and plea, much like the previous night.

“Could I have something to eat?” Graham asked finally.

“Of course, Will.” Hannibal said with a wide smile and moved to the kitchen to start preparing breakfast for them both.

He made sandwiches, the kind that Will had never tasted, and they ate in silence together until Hannibal felt the need to speak.

“I would offer you the guest room but it would be inconvenient for everyone involved. I will, however, show you a small studio I’m renting, and if you decide you want to stay there, you

will."

"Okay." Will said slowly, prolonging every vowel. "What's the other end of the deal?"

"What do you mean?"

"You see a man on the street, take him home, offer him food and shelter. And I'm supposed to believe you don't want anything in return?" Will explained.

"Hmmm… alright. I want you to tell me your story." Hannibal answered but it was a condition he had just come up with. It hadn't existed before.

"You are a very strange man, Hannibal Lecter." Will uttered, refraining from chuckling.

"I'm only a very bored man, Will." Hannibal corrected and stood up to clean up after breakfast.

They left the apartment before noon.

Chapter 3

“It’s amazing.” Will exclaimed when they entered the studio outside of the city centre.

The neighbourhood was peaceful and quiet, perfect for a place to live for an artist. The studio felt isolated and Will feared for a moment that Hannibal had, indeed, bad intentions. Yet, the man showed him around and sat in one of the chairs.

“It’s yours if you want.”

“For how long?” Will asked and sat in another chair, still looking around, astonished by the place. It was filled with paintings, drawings and sketches, possibly made by Lecter himself.

“For however long you need it.”

Will stared at Hannibal and sighed. Finally, he decided to cross the line.

“Is this about me being an Omega and you being my keeper?”

Lecter crossed his legs and leant in the chair.

“If it is, are you going to decline my offer?”

It took Will a moment to find the right answer, although he knew the general idea was that he was grateful and whatever the reason was for Hannibal to be so generous, Will would never pass on such an opportunity.

“No. I only want the conditions crystal clear.”

“Alright. Here are the conditions: you live here for however long you need, you don’t invite people here, you don’t smash the art. I come here twice a week but there’s a shop right around the corner so you don’t really need me to provide supplies for you.”

“Um, I…” Will stood up and put his hands inside his pockets. “I don’t know how to thank you.”

“Sit down, Will.” Hannibal ordered and disappeared himself from the room. He returned after a moment with two glasses of water in hand, one of which he offered Will, who took it willingly. “I already told you what I want in return.”

Will gulped the water and waited. Was he supposed to just start talking? Give everything away? Leave no element of surprise, no thrill of not knowing?

“My story.” Graham uttered gently and Hannibal nodded. He really must have been bored if he wanted to just hear a story.

The silence went on as Lecter stared at Will intensively.

“I’m an Omega, that much you already know. But that fact itself carries consequences throughout my whole life.”

“Understandable.” Hannibal commented and waved his hand, letting Will to continue.

“Another of my faults is an extreme sense of empathy.” Will confessed with disgust. “They figured it out pretty quickly and decided to make experiments on me. I was just a guinea pig for some ambitious medicasters, hungry for knowledge and success. It never mattered that they used me because I was an Omega.”

“Is that why I found you on the street, starving and terrified?”

“Yes. I escaped. I hid, ran, disguised. I set myself free.”

“You were in a facility.”

“A hospital, for the mentally ill and… There were all sorts of people there. And maybe I belonged there. But I couldn’t bear another second there anymore.”

“Alright. Now I’m certain you need this place as a shelter.”

“Are you really so bored that you’re going to harbour a former inmate? Do you really not feel threatened?”

Hannibal didn’t answer. The chair creaked as he stood up, interrupting the silence between them.

“I’ll come back in two days. Meanwhile, I’ll leave you some cash so you can buy yourself food and whatever else you need. Goodbye, Will.”

“How was your meeting with Alana?” Lecter asked when his wife entered the apartment. He was sitting by a desk, reading the manuscript Du Maurier gave him.

“It was annoying. But I’ve trained myself in the art of fake smiling.”

The remark made Hannibal smile, genuinely. He knew how Bedelia could be the centre of attention, could play the role of a loving wife and could fake all emotions whenever needed.

“She asked about you, of course.” Bedelia said as she poured herself a glass of wine. Two more steps in Hannibal’s direction and she leant against the doorframe. “Of all the people, it would make the most sense to me for you to have an affair with her.”

“You know I like her.”

She nodded and sipped the wine. Suddenly, she remembered something.

“Will you explain to me the situation from the morning?”

“You mean how you made a crack in my favourite statue?” Hannibal looked up from the manuscript and smiled widely. It was something that Bedelia always found unnerving.

“I mean on whose head I made a crack in your favourite statue.”

“It doesn’t concern you anymore. You will never lay eyes on him again.”

Bedelia nodded and took another step closer to the desk Hannibal was sitting by. He leant in the chair and looked at her.

“You know how accommodating and understanding I was about your affairs.” Du Maurier started and he nodded. “But you said it was a man you met just yesterday.”

“I saw him on the street. Compassion took over me and I offered him a place to sleep. That’s it.”

Her face betrayed nothing, an emotionless mask.

“Was he tempting?”

“Excuse me?”

“It’s been a while since your last affair. And he’s an Omega. You’ve never been with an Omega, have you?”

“No, I have not.” Hannibal answered, feeling a bit offended.

“Aren’t you curious?”

He considered the question and frowned. Why would she throw him at Will? It still amazed him how Bedelia was always curious about other people and how she interpreted every sign, body language, every word. One thing he had noticed pretty early was that she was either annoyed and bored or excited and trying to experiment with people. Keeping the appearances was her job and duty in their relationship, yet she liked manipulating others into doing something shocking. She never mocked, only guided in the wrong direction. It was her fault that Mason Verger treated his sister badly. It was her doing that Freddie Lounds, a Florentine journalist, had always a topic for her articles.

“We talked too much about a man that was supposed to be only an episode in our lives.” Hannibal said and stood up from his chair. Slowly, moving almost like a cat, he approached Bedelia and touched her hair gently. “It really has been a while…”

“Finish with that manuscript first.” Du Maurier ordered in a soft voice and then left the room.

It started raining as Hannibal sat back in the chair. His eyes shifted from the window to the pages on the desk, but the man couldn’t focus on anything. It was a strange feeling and one that Hannibal was not familiar with. Annoyance and excitement took turns in his head as he stared blankly at the manuscript.

Only then did he realise he was tired, exhausted really. He turned on his laptop, leaving the manuscript forgotten in one of the drawers, and started looking for the hospitals and experiments carried on empaths. None of the articles mentioned Will Graham. Everything was vague and written in such a way that there were no suspicions about the hospital's ethics.

Slightly discouraged, Lecter went on to looking for information about Omegas. In his whole life, Hannibal had met only two people of that kind and very briefly. There were, of course, the annual introduction of new, trained Omegas, like the one Lecter attended a day before. However, that only pleased the eyes and Hannibal was mostly engaged in conversations during the whole event. Besides, even if he had paid attention, no one had ever explained much about Omegas there, as the assumption was that everyone knew what they were getting into.

The Internet gave some anatomical background as well as a sort of instruction as to how treat Omegas. It felt strange and violating but Hannibal educated himself a bit about the heats and pregnancy, even though, honestly, he didn't need that sort of information.

Lecter's imagination worked fast and images of Will being bound and suffering while in heat in the hospital, under 'care' of the staff there, came to his mind quickly. There was no compassion, no sympathy, but Hannibal wondered what kind of person Will truly is. As interested in psychiatry as Lecter was, he was curious about Graham's experiences. His wife would approve – curiosity being her great feature.

Not to draw suspicions, Hannibal worked on the manuscript for the rest of the afternoon and took Bedelia for dinner in the evening. They went to an expensive restaurant, one of her favourite, and acted like a perfect couple. Everyone must have been enchanted by them and impressed how, after so many years of marriage, they were still working well in tandem.

They had sex, Bedelia being on top because Hannibal wanted to please her that night. It was difficult at times to live with another Alpha but they managed and years ago established the rule that they wanted to be admired and achieve their goals no matter what, that they would cooperate.

When Hannibal was certain his wife was fast asleep, he got out of bed and poured himself a drink. He was a practical man but that night he just wanted to have a drink and sit in his living room, looking at the city of Florence. Being constantly busy, he hadn't had much time to appreciate the little moments that made his life good, really good. Of course, he had always been fascinated with the city and had seen every corner, but now he felt like a stranger. The sight was unfolding before his eyes as he sipped the whiskey.

He went to sleep only when he felt his eyes heavy and hand no longer able to hold the glass.

"Tell me their names." Lecter asked as he drank the water.

Will was sitting opposite him, a glass of water in hand as well, and bowed his head. It was not easy to read him and his body language, as Lecter noticed at times the man was acting

shy and withdrawn and another moment his head was raised high and eyes boring into Hannibal.

“Why do you need them?”

“I want to know more. I have some friends among the doctors and I wish to investigate the matter further.”

“Why? Don’t you believe me? Or do you want to tip them where you keep me?”

Will seemed afraid and his hands shook, so much so that he had to put down the glass he was holding.

“If I wanted to report you, I’d have done so the night I found you. But I didn’t call the police or an ambulance. You can trust me.”

“Can I?”

“I guess you’ll have to take that risk. Unless you want to leave and wander the streets.”

Will shook his head after a moment and raised his head. That was it. That was the moment when his posture changed and from a vulnerable scared animal he became an equal to Hannibal. His eyes were dark.

“I’ll tell you. But I want something in return.” Graham said, an ultimatum for an ultimatum. Quid pro quo. “My heat is in a month or so. But I will be getting hot and sweaty and horny soon. It will escalate and I don’t need you to see it happen. I need some medicine and I need you to leave me alone for some time. Don’t come here.”

“That’s a lot to ask for. It’s my studio after all. You’re just my tenant.”

“I know. But you’re bored enough to agree. I’ll tell you the names, you can have your investigation and then, when you’re bored with me, I’ll leave. Everyone will be satisfied, at least for a few weeks.”

“Alright.” Hannibal said slowly, rubbing his chin. “I’ll get you some pills and a few toys.” There was definitely a wink there.

Will grabbed a piece of paper and a pen and started scribbling the names of the doctors who took care of him while he was in the hospital. He handed the list to Hannibal and the man scanned it briefly. One name in particular made his eyebrows twitch.

Chapter 4

“Doctor Chilton.” Hannibal said as he shook hands with the man.

“Frederick, please. Formality is not needed among friends.” Chilton said with a wide smile and sat in his chair.

Hannibal took the seat opposite the man. The room was quiet and Lecter could hear his own heartbeat. Discreetly, he looked around and assessed his surroundings. Among many expensive items were a mahogany, heavy-looking desk, a chandelier that immediately caught Lecter’s eye and a few disturbing paintings.

“I am really excited about your visit.” Frederick began. “Gladly, I will show you around and answer any questions. And I hope that next time we can see each other on a more neutral ground.”

“My wife and I would love to have you for dinner one evening.” Hannibal replied politely.

“Tomorrow, perhaps?”

Lecter was partly expecting the man to be eager, therefore, he was more or less prepared to agree to whatever condition. There was something he wanted as well and he was willing to spend one unpleasant evening in the company of that know-it-all to achieve it. Who knew, maybe Hannibal would have a chance to actually make fun of the man, without him even knowing about it.

“Seven o’clock?”

“Perfect. Now, shall we start out tour?” Frederick asked and stood up from his chair.

The men left the office and passed a gate with iron bars. The facility seemed greatly secured yet cosy. Everything that was in the view was clean and neat, nothing out of order, nothing that could be a reason for complaints.

“This is our main hall. It works like a living room. The patients come here, talk, play cards, do plenty of other stuff. They are encouraged to act but we don’t force them to do anything they don’t want to.” Dr Chilton explained as he presented a huge room on their left.

It was well-lit, with large windows and a few lamps. There were over twenty people there at that moment, minding their own business, no one noticed Hannibal or Frederick.

The next rooms were also big and neat, almost inviting, although no one of healthy mind would like to end up there. Chilton presented the whole facility, describing some of the patients and their illnesses, sometimes forgetting about doctor-patient confidentiality.

Lecter listened carefully, trying to get any information he could. He paid attention mostly to the important parts, omitting completely the bits about some patient’s diarrhoea.

Regardless of what Lecter thought, Frederick was careful about what he was revealing. The tour appeared like a commercial, like an ad, where you can mention only the good things and even make stuff up, just to show that everything works perfectly.

“Have you ever had any problematic patients?” Hannibal asked, peaking into another room, pretending the question was thrown without a deeper thought.

“A few. But we manage. As you know, I’ve been the administrator quite short. I may not know all of the previous cases.”

“Yes. That’s actually something I wanted to ask you as well. Naturally, the city will gain from having you here as the head of the facility, but can I ask what you were doing before? What’s your story, Frederick?” Hannibal asked warmly, smiling as he placed a hand on Chilton’s shoulder.

The man was elated. He was convinced he was getting a friend in Lecter, a very powerful friend.

“I'd been here. You may be aware that the last headmaster died. I applied for his position and, due to my knowledge, passion and future prospect, I was accepted. I’m already proving myself worthy of the position.”

Hannibal nodded and continued walking. They passed the kitchen and Lecter suspected they were nearing the end of the tour.

“Do you separate Omegas from Alphas?”

“We try not to, unless they go through their heats. We don’t want to cause any conflicts and we are averse to discrimination. The concept of strong and weak individuals here plays no role at all. It’s the illness that matters and determines the patient.” Chilton explained and took a turn to the right.

The corridor was leading back to the head office.

“I’m not professionally involved in psychiatry but I find the concept interesting at least and, if given opportunity, it would be something I would love to explore.” Hannibal said, taking a risk.

“You mean, you would experiment on Omegas?” Frederick asked with narrowed eyes.

There was not knowing if he would reveal anything after being encouraged but Lecter thought that if the man was indeed involved in such experiments, his pride and self-confidence would betray him.

“Well, not exactly. I mean, it’s not legal to experiment on people. But there is nothing wrong with conducting tests and making proper observations.”

“Huh. Obviously, we conduct tests.” Frederick amended. “And,” he added after a moment, “I make proper observations.”

The tone of his voice made Hannibal think he failed in his sly attempt to find out more about Will and the facility. Yet, after a short glance, Chilton smiled widely, revealing his white teeth. For people who were oblivious or who didn't talk to him at least once, Frederick seemed like a very sympathetic predator. There was something of horror in his eyes, yet he seemed more like a fool to Hannibal.

"Why didn't you pursue education in the field? You seem like an awfully curious person to me." Frederick remarked.

"I was far more interested in history and literature. But the human mind has always been a subject I wanted to explore and learn more about. I imagine there is still so much to discover."

"Naturally."

The conversation was not going to bring any new information and Hannibal didn't feel like pursuing anymore. Since they were going to meet the next day, there was no point in pressing further. Lecter thanked for the tour and left the facility.

It would have been suspicious if he entered a pharmacy and asked for suppressants and pills for Omegas. It was widely known that Hannibal as well as his wife were both Alphas and they didn't need that kind of medicines. The only solution was to have someone buy the things for him.

It wasn't a difficult task altogether, as there was a group of young boys hanging out near a pharmacy. Next to it was an off-licence shop. They were obviously trying to get someone to buy them alcohol and Hannibal calculated if that was a fair transaction.

Eventually, he decided to act. But in a different way.

He passed the group of boys and smiled when he smelt two of them were Omegas. The smile and a longing look at one of them made the two boys glance back and when Lecter disappeared around the corner, they followed. Apparently, they were old enough to start going through heats but still immature enough to behave recklessly. That was, however, what Lecter had counted on.

He leant his back against the wall of a building and waited. When they saw him just stand there, they both smirked. Yes, they read the signs correctly, more or less.

Hannibal started with showing them a small bottle he kept in his pocket. It was perfume but looked a bit like alcohol and the boys were tempted enough to take another step towards a stranger. And another. Until Hannibal could merely whisper and they would hear.

"Are you good boys?"

"Yes, sir." They answered and looked at each other.

"Are you approaching your heat?"

“Uh-huh.” One of the boys was bold enough to nuzzle Hannibal’s neck. It was too much.

“Wouldn’t you rather use suppressants and avoid this kind of situations?” Hannibal pursued.

The boys murmured something and went on to touching gently Hannibal’s front. One of them chuckled and took out a small packet from his pocket.

“They gave it to us in school. But aren’t we made like that for a reason?” The boys asked in a teasing voice.

“Oh, yes. We like to please. And be pleased by others.” The other boy agreed.

Hannibal took the packet from the boy’s hand, awfully proud of himself and happy that his impromptu plan worked perfectly.

“Unfortunately, my good boys, I already have an Omega who wants to please me.”

“We’re better.” One of the boys said hastily, without hesitation.

“You should start using those suppressants or you will be caught, trained and sold. There’s only so long you can walk the streets free and safe. Plenty of Alphas who enjoy not only the pleasure but also the pain.” Lecter warned and with a polite smile walked away.

“I invited doctor Chilton for dinner tomorrow.” Hannibal announced when he and Bedelia were reading newspapers by the fireplace in the evening. “I apologise it’s at such short notice but I had to make a decision quickly.”

“Why?” Du Maurier folded the paper and looked carefully at her husband.

“He’s new in the social circle and seemed desperate to be my friend so why not? We may entertain a bit, watching him try to present himself worthy of our friendship.” Lecter explained, not taking his eyes off the newspaper he was reading.

“I meant why did you have to make the decision in haste?”

“You weren’t there and he might have invited himself, actually. So all I did was agree. Are you mad?”

It was only then when he folded the paper and placed it on his lap to look at his wife. Her face betrayed nothing more than curiosity.

“No.” Was the answer. Short and cold.

“I’ll cook. I’ll prepare everything. You just have to look dashing but that’s not a difficult task for you, is it?”

“Is there something wrong, Hannibal?” Du Maurier asked, her hands folded in her lap.

“We’re having a quest for dinner and you know I love cooking so I will cook. There’s nothing wrong.”

“If you say so. Alright.” Bedelia resumed reading the newspaper.

She yawned after twenty minutes and looked at the clock. After taking a shower, she went to sleep.

Hannibal stayed up a bit longer, wondering if he was such a bad liar, if his wife sensed something. Maybe she smelt the Omegas on him and… Well, he hadn’t done anything wrong. Yet.

The door was locked but as Hannibal opened it, he immediately smelt an Omega in the studio. It was more prominent, more obvious to Lecter then. He entered the studio and moved to the main room, where his paintings were still on the walls and Will was sleeping on a couch.

There was one sketch that was new and it was definitely not one of Hannibal’s. Lecter took it in his palm and looked at it carefully.

“Hi.”

Hannibal heard Will’s tired voice and turned to look at the man. It was at that moment when it became apparent in how bad shape Will would be soon. His eyes were bloodshot, cheeks pale but starting to blush, hair a complete mess.

“Hello, Will. I didn’t mean to wake you, but-”

“It’s okay. I’ve been sleeping a lot lately. Or not sleeping at all.” There was a moment of pause and then Will felt the level of awkwardness reached its peak. “Did you bring me any pills?”

Hannibal reached for his pocket and showed a packet of suppressants. Placing them on the table, he didn’t take off his eyes of the man on the couch.

“You should probably stop coming here.” Will said firmly, aware of the hot stare on him.

“I can’t leave you here in this state. I rescued you from the street and I feel responsible for you.”

Graham shook his head. The question of ‘why’ crossed his mind but he knew the answer already. Lecter was bored.

“I know I smell. I can see it in your eyes. The hunger.”

“You don’t have to be scared of me. I can control myself. Besides, the pills-”

“The pills won’t make it go away. And no, you won’t be able to control yourself. Just leave me here for the next few weeks and then we’ll talk. Right now, we are both unable to think clearly.”

Hannibal wanted to turn it into a joke but he decided to leave it. He watched Will swallow two pills and place his head back on the pillow.

“I talked to Frederick Chilton.” Lecter said and checked for Will’s reaction. There was a mere twitch of lips but Will remained calm. “Had you been placed in the facility before he became the head administrator?”

“No.” Will closed his eyes. He was tired and that subject was making him even more uneasy. “He became the director exactly because he captured me.”

The statement made Hannibal regret he hadn’t done much research and actually conducted his investigation based on the words of different people. Certainly, there was more to the story and he was suddenly curious about every detail.

“That would mean you weren’t there very long.” Hannibal remarked, knowing that Chilton was indeed new in the circle, his career rocketing unexpectedly out of the blue.

“I had friends. They helped me flee.” Will explained.

“Where had you lived before?” Hannibal looked around and decided to refill the empty glass with water. It was only after Will had drank some, that he spoke.

“It’s… Look, I had an owner. He died. I was left alone, I was an Omega, I got to the facility.”

“Was there no one who would claim you?”

“Claim me? Like a dog?” Will asked, obviously angry. All he wanted was to be left alone, sleep and go through the worst that was actually only approaching.

“That’s the law, Will. However cruel it sounds to you. If you were owned-”

“There was no one else.” Will cut it short. It was the third time he interrupted Hannibal but the man had not yet become annoyed by the fact.

“I see.” Lecter said calmly and continued staring at Will.

“I’m sorry. I… Just leave me be, okay? I’m not going to smash anything. I’ll just lie here, sleep, maybe… well… I’m not going to leave any mess, I promise.”

“It’s fine, Will. I just wanted to help. But if that’s what you need, I’ll leave.”

“Hey.” Will grabbed Hannibal’s hand just as the man stood up from his chair and was about to leave. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Lecter answered and quickly added. “You need more pills. And you can’t go grocery shopping in this condition. So I will visit. Five minutes and I’ll be gone but I have

to.”

“Alright. Alright.” Will mumbled before he was asleep again.

Chapter 5

“Good evening, Frederick.” Hannibal greeted the guest as he opened the door.

“Good evening.” Chilton answered.

“Welcome.” Bedelia joined the scene and accepted the bouquet Frederick offered her.

“Mrs Du Maurier. You look stunning. In fact, I believe there is no proper adjective to describe the way you look tonight.” Chilton complimented and followed Hannibal to the dining room.

“Fancy a drink?” Bedelia asked as Lecter returned to the kitchen to finish cooking.

“Whatever the lady of the house offers.” Chilton nodded and smiled widely, the gesture and the words disgusted Du Maurier who saw herself as more than ‘the lady of the house’. In her mind, that was the ultimate insult. She played her role, however, smiled back and poured them a drink.

It wasn’t long before Hannibal asked them to the table, the meal ready.

Chilton seemed genuinely amazed by everything and quickly took a seat at the head of the table. Lecter glanced at his wife, who rolled her eyes at their guest’s lack of manners and over the top self-confidence. The couple took their seats at both sides of Chilton’s chair, Hannibal pushing the chair for his wife.

Lecter introduced the name of the meal they were about to eat, with the assumption that their guest would surely not understand and forget soon.

They began eating, Bedelia already tired and curious what awkward situation or conversation was going to happen next.

“My wife and I were wondering if you have a partner? I invited you without even thinking if you would bring someone. I apologise for not asking earlier.” Hannibal confessed.

“Oh, there’s no need. I try to stay away from any love affairs. They don’t interest me.”

“Then, you’re not going to be popular among the wealthy and snobbish. All they talk about during the parties is who came with whom and who shares whose bed.” Bedelia remarked and sipped the wine. She noticed when Frederick looked at her lips with disgust.

“So I assume you’re not a topic of many conversations? Since you seem like a perfect marriage.” The smile was derisive and Hannibal realised the man was not as stupid as he had assumed.

“You should listen more carefully next time.” Du Maurier said and cut in half a piece of meat.

“I believe people used to be opposed to our marriage, since my wife and I are both Alphas, but now I feel respect rather than disdain.” Hannibal explained.

“Yes, it is quite rare for two Alphas to be in a relationship. Even rarer still, for two Omegas.”

“You know, since you agreed so generously to having me for a tour in your hospital, I believe it would be only fair to invite you to my workplace one day. If you wish.” Lecter suggested politely, trying to change the topic.

“Certainly.”

“You seemed to be interested in the field as well.”

“Oh. I’ve just travelled a lot, talked to some people and I learnt that you were not in fact, a true Florentine. But as I said, someone’s origin does not determine someone’s value.” Frederick remarked, gaining himself a nod from Bedelia. Fake as it was, he didn’t mind, as long as he could act like the friend of the family.

“You are always welcome to see my presentations and speeches in the Palazzo Capponi.”

“If I ever find time between treating my patients and writing medical documents, I will gladly take you up on that offer.”

The dinner moved on, Hannibal slightly disappointed that Chilton was not as easy to ridicule as he had hoped. There was something Lecter needed to try, even if that meant taking a huge risk.

“I heard some rumours that one of your patients escaped the hospital. Can you tell us if that’s true, Frederick?”

Chilton’s face went pale, then the man blushed.

“I don’t know who and why would be spreading this kind of rumours but I assure you, no one leaves my facility until they are perfectly healthy.”

“Do you actually release any patients? I thought there was no cure for mental illness.” Bedelia asked.

“There are all sorts of mental illnesses. Some more serious, some easily treatable. We release only those who are admitted for a short period of time in the first place. You may know that we keep some patients for a few months, treat them for depression or other mild disorders. They can be released after some time.”

“What would happen if someone who’s not supposed to leave the facility fled?” Hannibal pursued, making both Bedelia and Frederick narrow their eyes. Du Maurier knew there was a reason for all those questions and became acutely attentive of what her husband was suggesting.

“That’s not really an option but we would definitely warn the city of Florence and capture the person who fled. But there really is not a reason for panic as no one escaped so I don’t know

where you could have hears this rumour." Chilton explained calmly.

"I was having a walk and accidently eavesdropped on someone's conversation. The men seemed honest and sometimes people know before anything is said officially." Lecter justified.

"That's not the case here. The city is safe." Frederick announced with a reassuring smile towards Bedelia, who smiled back.

After the dinner, Hannibal was washing the dishes and Bedelia decided to have one more drink.

"It didn't go as I had imagined. But well enough." Du Maurier commented and stared at her husband, all calm and innocent. "Did you really hear those rumours?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want to scare you. I wanted the information confirmed."

"And you thought he would tell you straight away that one of his patients escaped?"

"You saw his reaction to my question. It's not always the words that betray the truth."

"No, it's not." Bedelia agreed firmly and Hannibal knew she was aware of something being hidden from her.

They had a shower and went to sleep. No other comments, no stating the facts as they were. Hannibal only thought of the next day, how he needed to find a way to get Will some pills and how he still needed to read the manuscript Bedelia had given him. He didn't want to test the limit of her patience.

The day was gloomy. It wasn't exactly raining but the humidity reached its peak and together with the fog they created an image of an abandoned city. No one could see anything, it was difficult to drive and many people stayed home or indoors.

Lecter told Bedelia he was going to his studio to paint because the weather actually inspired him. Du Maurier didn't question that, only reminded him of the manuscript, again, and warned him against the inmate that was presumably wandering the streets.

It sounded like a joke but he could sense she knew. They never had any secrets and suddenly he felt guilty. His wife knew about his every lover. And Will was not his lover. Yet. So there was no point in keeping him a secret.

Hannibal found himself a young man who didn't ask any questions and seemed loyal enough to keep his mouth shut. His duties involved buying pills for Omegas and checking on Lecter's studio from time to time, when Hannibal couldn't.

The man left shopping bags in a container by the studio, where Hannibal kept some of his bigger tools.

Lecter took the bags and unlocked the door. The sweet scent made him take a step back. It was as if someone sprayed perfume all around the studio. The flowery and candy sweet scent wafted through the rooms as Hannibal made his way to the main room, filled with his paintings.

“Your scent!” Lecter exclaimed when he spotted Will sitting by one of the easels. He put the bags down carefully and had a look at what his guest was drawing.

It was a picture in charcoal, presenting a pattern rather than a shape. For anyone else than Hannibal, it might have seemed like a daub, something a child might have drawn. But Lecter saw the potential and the desperation behind the picture.

“I told you it would get worse.” Will replied, finally.

“You don’t actually look so bad. It seemed like the pills worked?”

Will shied away and stood up from the chair. Suddenly, he realised Hannibal caught him use his stuff.

“I’ve never been involved with an Omega. Forgive me if I don’t know-”

“Involved?” Will turned and looked straight into Hannibal’s eyes. He was terrified of the suggestion and more than ready to flee.

Lecter didn’t quite know how to respond and only watched Will lose his temper.

“Do you want to be involved with me?”

“Will…”

“Believe me, you don’t. People involved with me end badly.” Graham stated and sat on the couch, peaking into the shopping bags Hannibal had brought.

“What do you mean?”

“I’ll tell you when you get bored. Can’t lay out all my cards at once, can I?”

Hannibal smiled and nodded. He could wait.

“What was the name of the man that you hosted?” Bedelia asked. It was a chilly evening and she decided to close the windows.

“Excuse me?” Hannibal acted innocent as he continued reading an article online.

“The man you hosted for the night. Remember? What was his name? And please, don’t tell me you let someone sleep here without asking for a name first.” Du Maurier pursued.

“Why do you need to know that now?” Lecter asked without looking at his wife. He tried to appear natural but they both knew something was off.

“Curious.” Was Bedelia’s excuse.

“As always.” He smiled and finished the article. His eyes shifted to her face in order to gauge the level of trouble he might have been in.

“I talked to a friend who has a friend. The circle goes back to the hospital for the mentally ill. Apparently, you were right. A patient fled. Probably, a very dangerous one, since no one knew him, no one had sessions with him. It seems as if he had never been there.”

“What are you suggesting?” Hannibal asked, pleased because it seemed Bedelia had suspicions similar to his own.

“You know what.”

“Frederick Chilton’s own guinea pig.”

“And you have to see it clearly now, how the time of the patient’s escape and the time of you hosting a complete stranger-”

“Alright. It was Will. Graham.” Hannibal had already checked the Internet and found no information whatsoever about the man or his past. It was extremely convenient for everyone involved that the man was a no-name.

“Thank you.”

“What are you going to do?” Lecter asked.

“What I’m good at. Be curious. Ask.”

Later, that same evening, Lecter’s phone rang. The number was unknown but Hannibal answered anyway.

“I believe we have to talk.”

It was Chilton’s voice. The man tried to sound calm but since he called, he must have been desperate enough.

“It’s you who calls so it seems you have to talk.” Lecter replied politely, a smirk on his face.

“It seems to me you have either something that I lost or at least some information about this something.”

“I don’t think so.” Hannibal cut it short. Then, mostly for his own amusement, he added. “You never reported it missing. Why is that?”

“Let’s meet.”

Chapter 6

“Your wife doesn’t mind you coming here so often?” Will asked as Hannibal poured them both a glass of water.

“No.” Lecter answered calmly and handed one glass to Will. His eyes were still somewhat focused on Graham’s charcoal picture.

“She doesn’t know, does she?” Will pursued. “You didn’t tell her.” There was another pause as the realisation seemed to sink in. The words were uttered with clear disgust. “I’m your kept pet.”

“I prefer the term guest.”

“How about ‘the other woman’?”

“You’re hardly a woman.” Lecter observed, amused.

“But you treat me like you would treat a woman.”

“I treat you like I treat some of my lovers.”

“Some of them?” Will seemed surprised.

“The rest I treat… differently.”

“Show me.” Will demanded.

The words ignited a spark in Hannibal. He reached for one of Will’s hands and gently lifted it, giving the man ample time to stop whatever was going to happen. Graham only observed his right hand being raised and then Hannibal’s lips pressing against it. It was a delicate, loving gesture that lasted quite briefly but still seemed to extend in time.

Lecter smelt the hand and brushed it with his nose and then lips, as Will closed his eyes and surrendered. The pills were working and he was not a vulnerable, pliant Omega, yet almost anyone would give in to Hannibal’s treatment.

“That’s not what you meant, is it?” Will asked when Lecter finally pulled away enough for Graham to clear his mind.

“No, but I would rather treat you this way.”

“You’ve had plenty of lovers, I assume?”

“All pale in comparison.” Hannibal smiled sweetly.

“To me?”

“To you.” Lecter confirmed and watched Will chuckle.

“You don’t even know me.”

“I enjoy mysteries.” Lecter remarked, his eyes glistening and focused on Will.

“You’ll get bored, eventually.”

“Then, let me know you. Try me.”

“It’s just… I think you’re behaving like this only because I’m an Omega, because you’ve never been with one and I’m some sort of challenge for you.”

“True. To some extent.”

“And maybe you think that I’ll fall at your feet and give up everything to serve you. And that I’ll be glad to give up all control because you’re an Alpha and that I would like for you to provide for me and-”

“This is more or less what I’ve been doing so far. But if you find it unnecessary…”

“I am grateful.” Will said firmly. “But I am not your pet. And I am not your mate.”

“You’re fighting for independence.” Lecter remarked, a statement rather than a question, as the situation became abundantly clear.

“Yes. And I know it’s a lot to ask for in my position.”

“You had a taste of it and now you want more.”

“It’s not like that.” Will disagreed and shifted on the couch.

“Tell me.”

“Tell me why you married and Alpha when you could have had a pet like me.”

Lecter considered telling Will everything. There was not much to lose, since it wasn’t something he was hiding from anyone.

“My story for your story.” Hannibal suggested and waited for the answer.

“There will be nothing left for me to say afterwards. And I feel quite comfortable here.”

Hannibal thought about the ways how to persuade Will. There was no information online and Graham didn’t seem to have a record in Chilton’s hospital. Someone was lying. Lecter could just as well tell the truth.

“I’m meeting Frederick Chilton tonight.”

The words were deliberate and Will’s face lost most of its colour. He was terrified but only seemed to get even more determined not to tell anything. His lips and eyes became tightly

shut.

They both took a deeper breath and then Hannibal decided to speak again, reveal even more.

“We had dinner yesterday.”

“What?”

“He suspects I may have information about your whereabouts.”

“Indulge me, what did he offer you for the information?” At that point Will was shocked, terrified and resigned.

“Nothing, as of yet. And I’m not going to sell you. But I think now you see that telling me your story is crucial.”

“You know I could be lying?” Will asked, even though playing that game was dangerous. However, Hannibal appreciated that the man was no longer acting innocent and shy. They took off their masks.

“I know.”

“But you choose to believe me?”

“We can come back to the initial offer. My story for your story. I’ll start if you wish.”

Will stared at the man before him and nodded. Lecter settled comfortably in a chair, knowing it wouldn’t take long to say what he wanted. He cleared his throat and began, shifting his gaze from Will to his drawing.

“My parents died when I was very young. But before they did, they put a lot of effort in securing my future. Since I was born, they started looking for my future wife. There were quite a few families that were interested in the deal, especially given our fortune, but the negotiations led to nothing.”

Hannibal took a sip of water and continued after assessing Will’s expression of infinite interest.

“My parents knew a family in France, with whom they were very friendly. The family had a daughter. That’s more or less it. They made a deal and promised we would get married when we would reach proper age.”

Lecter’s smile was disarming, even though he was getting to the sad part.

“My parents died on their return journey from France. Quite an irony, huh? They settled a life for me and could die peacefully.”

Will frowned, hearing how Hannibal approached the topic. It couldn’t have been easy but he didn’t seem disturbed or nostalgic.

“I received proper education, kept in touch with the daughter – I got her address and we exchanged letters. When she came of age, she visited me. We decided that the wouldn’t force it and I assured her that if she didn’t want it, we didn’t have to get married. I was probably more terrified of her than she was of me. Especially since she was an Alpha. But I didn’t mind and we actually liked each other’s company so we got married.”

“Do you love her?” Will asked after a pause but Hannibal tutted.

“It’s your turn now.”

“Alright.” Graham looked around, as if someone else might have been listening, and then proceeded. “I’ve already told you I had an owner. He was an older man. He was kind and supportive and treated me well. We could talk and laugh for hours. We were friends. I felt safe. I was taking suppressants and other pills and everything was fine.”

Will was smiling as he was speaking and Hannibal found him genuine.

“Once, he got drunk, a bit more than usual. He wanted to take advantage of me. Fortunately, I was stronger than him and managed to push him away. He fell asleep and the next day – didn’t remember a thing. He left me alone for some time. Then, one evening he invited one of his employees.”

“Frederick.” Hannibal cut in and Will nodded.

“It wasn’t anything new, we would have his co-workers occasionally for dinner or lunch. Fred was awfully proud and confident but he behaved politely towards my owner.” There was another pause as Will checked Hannibal’s reaction. It seemed they both had this impression of Chilton. “He was making eyes at me. He tried every opportunity to get in touch with me. I knew he was an Omega, even though he was trying to mask it, using all sorts of pills to create an illusion he was an Alpha, the strong one.”

Hannibal watched as Will sipped some water and seemed to be considering what to say next and how. It was as if he just then realised that it could have gone some other way. But it was too late. He smiled at his pointless hope.

“My owner tried to get his hands on me again and I’m not ashamed of starting to hope he would die soon. I was tired of his frequent mood swings and I was afraid I would lose my independence. I mean, what if…” Will didn’t finish and seemed to have realised he was being to open and honest.

“What if he got you pregnant? And then died?” Hannibal read Graham’s concern easily.

“Anyway, Fred visited us two more times. The second time he made advances towards me when my owner wasn’t in the room. Now, that I think of it, I never actually rejected him.” There was a moment of consideration and a flash of regret on the man’s face. So many things could have happened and so many could not. “My owner died of a heart attack not long after Fred’s last visit. The doctor stated it was an accident, a thing bound to happen sooner or later but the police questioned me and I know they suspected that it was my fault. They looked at

me, smelt me and I heard them whisper that ‘the old guy couldn’t keep up with his pet’s desires’. It was disgusting.”

“They took you for granted and told the story that suited them best.” Hannibal summed up.

“I wasn’t charged with anything but I could not stay in the house, alone, independent. I am an Omega after all.” Will’s mouth twisted sourly. “Fred was the first one running to help. He offered he would take me home and treat me well but I saw the hunger in his eyes and besides… he’s an Omega, too. I didn’t mind that, actually. It was mostly the way he behaved. You know…”

Hannibal nodded his head in silent confirmation.

“So in a sick kind of revenge he kidnapped me and presented to the people in the hospital. They knew it was illegal and unethical but oh what a great opportunity. To have a chance at examining an empath Omega. And since there was a vacancy for the administrator’s position, Fred got it.”

Hannibal was walking home, thinking about what Will had told him. Either the story was true or not, he was going to confront Chilton and listen to his version of events. Lecter decided that whatever happened, he would not admit he was harbouring Will. Whether the story of Graham’s past was true or not, it suited Hannibal to keep the man by his side. He was only considering the ways he could legally claim Will. Since he was married, that might have turn out to be nearly impossible but he could afford the best lawyer in town, who would surely advise him what was the best option and at the same time be discreet.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> it's shorter but i thought i'd leave another conversation for the next chapter (hopefully on Monday)

“Are you finished with the manuscript?” Bedelia asked when she entered Hannibal’s study.

The man was sitting by his desk, staring at the computer screen and most probably reading something. Something that wasn’t the manuscript and something he’d rather not be found reading because as soon as he heard Bedelia’s voice, he closed all tabs in the browser.

Hannibal rarely used vulgar language but at that moment he wanted to curse louder than ever. He disappointed Bedelia. Again. And he had no excuse.

“What’s her name?” Du Maurier asked and looked around the room. Despite never having brought a lover to the apartment, Lecter had a tendency to keep something in his study that would indicate he was having an affair. It wasn’t of emotional or sentimental nature, rather a trophy or something to remind him of his other commitments.

“What?”

“You don’t have time, you’re distracted. What’s the name of the lady that keeps you so busy?”

“There’s no lady.” Hannibal replied and rubbed his eyes.

“No? Perhaps a man, then?”

Lecter sighed. There was an obvious suspicion in his wife’s voice but no accusation. She seemed more mad about the manuscript and the fact that Hannibal still hadn’t finished than the fact that he was having an affair.

“You know I don’t mind. I never did. As long as it’s behind closed door.”

“I know.”

But what if he told her it was Will? That he was harbouring a wanted man in his studio and was really getting more and more interested in him?

“Then why is this one different? You lie, you hide him, you-”

“He’s not… a lover. Not in the most common way of understanding the term.” Lecter explained.

Bedelia raised her eyebrow and waited. It was apparent something was off and she could see Hannibal was breaking. He was going to tell her everything if she pushed only a bit harder. So she waited.

The silence didn’t last long. Lecter blinked hard, trying to act tired, and then spoke.

“It’s Will. The man I hosted here for the night, the one you hit with the statue – my favourite statue.”

“The Omega.” Bedelia added and suddenly everything clicked. She had half-expected that to happen but also probably half-wished it wouldn’t.

“He’s on suppressants and we haven’t had sex.”

“That doesn’t mean he’s not a lover. Just a different kind.” Du Maurier concluded and sighed heavily. There was a sign of relief in the gesture, as if the truth cleansed her. “You’re not paying for a hotel room for him, are you? I check our bank account regularly. No, you let him stay in the studio.”

“I don’t know for how long. For all I know he could have left already.”

“Why would he when he has such a caring keeper.” There was obvious mocking in the words but none in the woman’s tone.

“I’m not… Is this conversation over?” Hannibal added after glancing at his watch. It was getting late.

“For now, yes.”

Lecter nodded, grabbed his jacket and left the apartment.

He walked fast, his steps quick but short. The evening was chilly and the air had a very peculiar scent. Lecter passed a museum, a pharmacy and in the darkness saw the entrance to the park.

He stopped. A couple he knew just left the theatre but, thankfully, they didn’t spot him. There was, of course, plenty of reasons and explanations why he was standing by the park all by himself. Hannibal was good in making up stories and constructing lies. He had lived with Bedelia, the mistress of deception, for years. Yet, he always preferred the truth.

The street became awfully empty, as if abandoned, when Lecter entered the park. Once his foot crossed the threshold, there was no going back. He wasn’t afraid of anything, he had no reason to be. There was no evidence of him doing something illegal, just like there was no evidence against the man he was going to meet.

“Dr Lecter.”

Hannibal heard the voice coming from one of the benches. Indeed, there was a man sitting there in a dark coat and a ridiculous hat.

“Dr Chilton.” Lecter acknowledged the presence of the man and took a seat next to him on the bench.

“I’m not going to waste both of our time and will just be straightforward. You know why we’re here.” Frederick stated and seemed to stare in front of him, at the pond. The lamps were illuminating parts of the park but it wasn’t easy to recognise people’s faces, especially with the fog starting to appear and blur everyone’s vision.

“You said you’d lost something.” Hannibal replied and waited for more from Chilton.

“And during my dinner with you I got the impression you knew where I could find it.”

“Did you try putting an ad for help?” Lecter asked very seriously, acting as if he didn’t know what Frederick was talking about.

“It’s very important. You may not realise what a dangerous situation this puts you in.”

“How so?”

“If you found a bomb but had no idea how it worked, you might get yourself killed.” Chilton said with a particular smirk. “A very good weapon in very unaware hands becomes useless. Or it can cause a lot of damage, being under no control.”

“Did you lose a bomb, Frederick?” Hannibal was plainly amused at that point. “Being in possession of a weapon is illegal.”

Chilton blushed furiously, enraged to the breaking point. Hannibal was wondering if he would finally admit what this was about or if would attack him physically. Instead, Frederick chose another way of dealing with the matter. A very smart one, if Lecter was being honest.

Chilton leant closer in order to whisper carefully so that only Hannibal could hear him.

“I can give you another Omega. More handsome, with less needs. You must know by now that Will’s not an easy one. Why go to all the trouble?”

“I like the challenge.” Hannibal replied in an equally low voice and was ready to leave when Chilton grabbed his sleeve.

“Did he tell you that he killed his previous owner?” A pause. Chilton gauged Hannibal’s reaction but the man kept calm. Lecter was a very skilled poker player and everyone seemed to both hate him for that and envy him.

Hannibal stayed in place and waited for Chilton to completely unmask himself.

“He only looks innocent. With his big blue eyes and fake shyness. But it’s just a façade.”

Lecter's eyes got dark but it was impossible to notice that in the late evening hours. The silence was stretching and Frederick seemed to be getting more and more desperate.

"What do you want? Tell me and you will have it. There's plenty of advantages for you in this arrangement. Just tell me where he is and I'll be indebted. Believe me, you want to have a friend in me."

The last sentence sounded more like a threat and Hannibal felt like Chilton was sending mixed signals. Yet, the offer was terribly tempting. It was just the fact that Hannibal didn't need anything from Chilton, there was nothing Frederick could get him. And Lecter felt very protective of Will.

Hannibal smiled, shook Frederick's hand and stood up. Chilton's eyes widened impossibly and the man was rendered speechless. All of his efforts were futile.

"Have a nice rest of the evening, Frederick."

Lecter came home and sat by his desk in the study. He opened his jacket and took out the small recorder from the inside pocket. That was proof enough of something shady that Chilton was involved in.

Hannibal took the manuscript out of the drawer and started looking through it. Bedelia wasn't at home so Lecter had some peace to finally finish what she ordered him to do. Then, he would be free. She might even drop any accusations against him and everything could return to normal. Apart from the fact that Hannibal was harbouring a former inmate in his studio and he was slowly falling for the man as well as his mysteries.

Du Maurier entered the apartment after midnight and when she didn't find Hannibal already asleep in their bedroom, she assumed he was fondling with his new lover.

On her way to the bathroom, Bedelia spotted a beam of light coming from the study. Immediately, she grabbed the nearest heavy object, which happened to be a vase, and opened the door wider. A sight of Hannibal being asleep with his head resting on the manuscript welcomed Du Maurier. She smiled and considered whether to wake her husband or leave him like that until it would become too uncomfortable, almost hurtful, to sleep in that position and he would eventually end up in their bed.

Bedelia touched Hannibal's arm and called out his name. He was barely aware of his surroundings but managed to get to their bedroom on his own, change and fall on the bed.

Bedelia took a shower and lay down next to him in twenty minutes. She kissed his shoulder, knowing he was already soundly asleep and would pay no attention to that, and surrendered to dream herself.

Chapter 8

It was a very warm morning and the sun was beaming through the windows, straight onto the bed. Bedelia woke up and immediately noticed the empty place beside her. Hannibal had been already up.

Du Maurier left the bedroom and didn't instantly spot her husband in the hall or the kitchen so she went to the bathroom. On her way back to the wardrobe, she entered the study, where Lecter was looking through the drawers, seemingly searching for something.

When he spotted his wife's presence in the room, he spoke.

"I finished with the manuscript. I left you some notes and comments."

"Thank you." Bedelia replied and watched as Hannibal kept opening and closing the drawers. "What are you searching for?"

"Oh, uh, it's nothing."

"Doesn't seem like nothing."

"I thought I'd put some documents in one of those drawers but it seems I didn't because I can't find them."

"You probably left them in the Palazzo." Bedelia reasoned and sighed, seeing how Hannibal had still not recovered and was continually distracted.

"It would appear so. I need to go there and check." Hannibal stood up and put on a jacket. "Maybe we could go out for dinner today? At six?"

"Of course." Du Maurier answered and left the room. Lecter left the apartment a few minutes later.

Indeed, Lecter found the documents left intact in the Palazzo Capponi, and cursed. His wife was right, as usual. He had been distracted and he had been sloppy. But appearances be damned if he truly felt responsible for Will. There were two solutions to the situation with doctor Chilton, one slightly more interesting but possible only if what Frederick had said was true.

Hannibal drove to a pharmacy outside of the city and bought some more pills for Will. He decided to visit the man the next day, when he would be closer to heat. Hannibal was curious in what state he would find Will.

Until six Lecter had gone to the Palazzo, eaten lunch, drunk coffee, filed some documents, talked to a curator and managed to make a few calls regarding the next exhibition. Then, he finally took his car and drove home to pick up his wife.

The meal was nice. The atmosphere, not so much. Bedelia looked stunning, as always, in a crimson dress and a pair of earrings with rubies she had got from Hannibal for her thirty-forth birthday. Yet, she was constantly looking around, smiling to some of her acquaintances, and paying little attention to her partner.

Naturally, she responded to his remarks and kept the conversation going but Lecter knew she wasn't at all interested. In fact, he knew her long and good enough to know she was mad.

They drove home and Bedelia instantly moved to the bedroom to change.

Hannibal poured himself a drink and sat on the couch in the living room. He waited until Bedelia put on a different dress and reappeared. When she saw the bottle on the coffee table, she reached for a glass and poured herself some whiskey as well. She didn't sit, just sipped the whiskey and looked at Hannibal. The silence stretched on as they gazed at each other, Lecter visibly trying to read what he had done wrong again.

"You may want to reconsider your poor choice of lovers." Du Maurier said finally.

"Why?"

"Every day I learn more and more about your boy." Bedelia stated and sat opposite Hannibal, in an armchair.

"A few days more and you'll know him better than I do." The words were supposed to be funny but they weren't. Bedelia half-smiled bitterly and finished her drink. She poured herself another one.

"He knows what he's doing. He'd been trained. And sold. He possesses the knowledge and skills. He's seducing you. And you are neither blind nor stupid not to see that. You're just letting him."

"I am."

Hannibal uttered the words hastily, without thinking. He remembered the fact that the man was an empath, or so he claimed. There was a whole set of skills he could use, and probably had, to make Hannibal rescue him from the life on the streets. Moreover, Lecter offered him the studio, barely a few hours after meeting the man. There was a particular charm in Will and the sense of vulnerability which made it impossible to deny him anything. Then, there was the fact that Will was an Omega and Hannibal had never taken an Omega lover. Not that Will was truly his lover.

"I can tolerate it as long as it's boredom and as long as it's behind closed doors."

"I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know?" Bedelia asked, suddenly appearing offended and surprised. Hannibal wondered when was the last time he saw his wife so utterly taken aback.

"It's not purely boredom anymore." Hannibal replied, not able to face Bedelia. His eyes shifted to the bottle on the table.

“You mean… You want to say it’s not just sex?” She became calm again, thinking of possible solutions to that situation. It seemed she really didn’t mind her husband have another affair.

“It’s never been about the sex.”

“I don’t care. I’m not going to lose reputation or money because of your stupid fling. You can fuck him all you want. Hell, you can even love him. But everything behind closed doors, in the quiet and privacy of your rooms, not in the streets. I don’t want to see it or hear about it.”

Du Maurier’s voice was calm but firm. She was determined to sustain her reputation of a loving wife and independent woman. Hannibal, on the other hand, was slightly surprised by the lengths to which Bedelia was ready to go to ensure she was still important and her position in that relationship would not change.

“You can live with the fact that I’ll love another and still be married to you?”

“You don’t love him and, let’s be honest, you’ve never loved me. Our relationship was never as passionate as some of your flings. But they all died out.”

“And our marriage works perfectly.” Hannibal finished what Bedelia was clearly getting at. The words left his mouth, leaving a bitter taste but when he thought about it, it was more or less true. He’d had many affairs, none lasted more than two weeks. Every time, his wife was understanding and still seemed to care about him. They were a peculiar couple, but a powerful one. Everyone envied them their love and money and everyone liked their story.

“Exactly.”

Lecter didn’t reply. There was nothing he could say. Indeed, he couldn’t have fallen in love with Will after just a couple of weeks and he appreciated his wife’s reason.

They finished their drinks, had a bath and went to sleep. Simple as that.

Hannibal lay in bed for an hour but couldn’t quite fall asleep. Bedelia seemed to have no problem with that - her breathing steadied as soon as her head hit the pillow.

Lecter went to the kitchen to have some water and stood by the window. The city seemed to move on already. It never waited, never rested. Whatever happened in Hannibal’s life, the city stayed the same. The universe never paid attention.

Lecter dressed up and left the apartment. He considered driving to his studio, to paint or write or simply drink and go to sleep there. Then, he remembered that he had a guest there, who was probably already asleep. What’s more, Hannibal realised he’d already had some whiskey so driving was not really an option. He thought of having a walk and then images of Will came to his mind, of the night when Lecter found the man beaten up and shaking on the street.

Finally, he left the apartment and hailed a taxi. The drive to the studio stretched unbelievably. Hannibal looked through the window, observed a couple by a fountain when the taxi waited

for the green light, he followed a woman on the street with his eyes. Twenty minutes later, he paid the driver and stood by the door to the studio.

Surprise awaited Hannibal as he entered the apartment because the lights were on and someone was humming in the main room. Thoughts of Will having a guest over passed Hannibal's mind but he decided to interrupt whatever was happening anyway.

To his further surprise, Will was simply sitting by a canvas and drawing another charcoal picture. When he spotted his host, he almost dropped the piece of charcoal and his eyes widened. Then, he smiled and continued the drawing.

"A night visit?"

"I couldn't sleep." Hannibal explained and glanced at the canvas before Will. There was a faint shape of someone's face and Hannibal immediately wanted to know everything about the person who was evidently on Will's mind. Perhaps it was his previous owner who had died.

After a moment of staring at the picture, Hannibal realised how tired and distracted he was. He wasn't actually looking at the drawing at all. It took him another minute to truly see that it was his face that Will had tried to reconstruct.

The next revelation was the scent that hit his nostrils just then. Of course. Will was an Omega approaching his heat. How could he have missed the smell?

Lecter sat on the couch and blinked a few times.

"Are you alright? Do you want some water?"

"Yes, please."

Will reappeared in the room with a glass of water and sat next to Hannibal on the couch. He watched his host as the man drank and waited. He imagined there must have been a reason for Hannibal to come visit him so late in the night.

The silence stretched, however. Hannibal emptied the glass and set it aside. He turned to face Will, who was looking back at him.

Lecter smiled and thought how unfortunate it was – having a man in his studio, a man whom he saved and who might have felt some sort of gratitude for him; an Omega, a man whom Bedelia had already called his lover. And yet, his boldest move was a kiss on the hand.

Hannibal looked into the man's eyes and assessed how aware he was. An Omega in heat may give up all control and, despite the fact that Will was on pills and seemed more or less focused and lucid, there was craving in the man's eyes. Graham's pupils were bigger than they should be and he was visibly sweating. Hannibal had read how bad heats can be for Omegas and felt slightly relieved that Will didn't have to go through excessive sweats and increased libido.

Lecter's lips parted gently and he reached out to stroke Will's hair. The man didn't seem to mind and he was the first who leant in. Hannibal moved closer and made the connection between them happen. The kiss was slow, almost making Hannibal disappointed because he had assumed Will would simply throw himself on Lecter. It must have been the pills that allowed them to enjoy the lazy and gentle making out session.

A barely audible noise caused Hannibal to pull back and check if Will was still aware and willing.

Graham didn't like the pause and resumed kissing Hannibal. The temperature in the room seemed to rise and Lecter took off his jacket, still pressing his lips against Will's. The Omega became bolder and started undoing the buttons in Hannibal's shirt. When he got to the man's pants, he felt how aroused Lecter had been.

Hannibal stood from the couch and pulled down his trousers along with his underwear, exposing himself completely. Only then did Will join him and while he took off his t-shirt, Lecter took care of his pants. Soon, they were both standing naked in front of each other, aroused and hungry for flesh.

Will's penis was small, like a young boy's member, but it stood proud. It was contrasting starkly with Hannibal's cock – heavy-looking, thick and ready. Yet, in Omega's body there was a part that was more important than a penis and one that offered more pleasure.

Hannibal approached Will and became enchanted, almost hypnotised, by the man's scent. It was heavy and intoxicating and it was everywhere. Through Lecter's nostrils it went down his throat and straight to his lungs. Hannibal breathed in and touched Will's chest. It wasn't as broad or muscular as Lecter's but it was smooth and with every beat of Will's heart, his chest moved a bit. Hannibal felt more alive than ever simply by feeling the life in someone else.

Will's eyes betrayed his true colours and his breathing became sharper and shallower. Despite his wish to become independent and remain no one's pet, Graham knelt in front of Hannibal and inhaled. The musky scent of manliness and power got to Will's nostrils and suddenly the only thought in his head was to close his lips over that man's cock.

Graham wasted no time and simply put his mouth on Hannibal's penis. He tried swallowing him whole but he couldn't. His gag reflex worked against him and Will had to be patient and relax in order to take Hannibal whole in his mouth.

Lecter didn't seem to mind the Omega's lack of preparation or experience and waited patiently until Will could swallow a bigger part of his cock. It was a difficult task since he was probably bigger than the average, yet, as an Omega, Will should be able to make it.

Graham smiled when he fought his gag reflex and felt Hannibal's cock reach his throat. Will pulled back a bit to tease the man above him. He licked and kissed and sucked only the tip, just the head, and then, resumed swallowing Hannibal's length.

It seemed Lecter grew even harder and bigger under Will's touch of his tongue. Graham, on the other hand, started dripping and the hole behind his penis became impossibly wet. The

Omega was more than ready to take a cock and soon, Will was going to beg for it if he had to. He stopped sucking and wiped his mouth, leaving Hannibal's cock unattended. There was another place where Will wanted it to be stuck, so he turned around on his knees and lifted his hips to present his ass and his tempting wet hole.

The sight made Hannibal growl and, even though a second ago he was mad that Will ceased giving him oral pleasure, he bent and kissed the Omega's shoulder blades. At the same time, his hand reached for Will's hole to check and prepare the Omega. The mixture of light sweet kisses along his neck and spine and two fingers sliding in and out was making Will dizzy. His head hung down and he was tempted to reach for his small cock but he knew that if he would, he'd come immediately.

Instead, he reached behind him to grasp Hannibal's hair and pull on it until he would be scolded for it. Lecter, however, was too lost in the act to be bothered and he actually seemed to like it. Under pressure, his fingers became rougher and soon, he withdrew them completely in order to replace them with his cock.

It was slow and Hannibal kept touching and kissing Will's back as he pushed inside. There was no reason why he should be rough and he didn't want to hurt Will.

Graham moaned and felt as if something was splitting him in half. He reached behind him and grabbed Hannibal's butt to push him even more forward. Another thrust and they both moaned.

Will's knees were starting to hurt from rubbing against the floor but he barely registered the pain when he was ploughed by a caring and handsome Alpha.

Hannibal kissed the small of Will's back and lifted his eyes enough to see the man's work on the canvas. It was him – he could see it clearly then. Whether it was a result of boredom or manipulation, Graham drew him, thought of him, remembered him.

Another push inside and Will almost screamed. It wasn't exactly violent but it had been a while since Graham was fucked like that. In fact, no one had ever made him feel like he felt at that moment. There was passion and fire and brutal simplicity but simultaneously Hannibal offered kisses and from time to time he paused for a short second to check if Will was alright.

When Hannibal's fingers found their way to Will's nipples and started rubbing and twisting, Will's hole clenched around the cock inside him. They were both close and Lecter knew he would be coming with a few thrusts more. He kissed Will's shoulder sloppily, bit his neck lightly and pinched his nipple, all the while pushing inside and losing the rhythm completely. That was the ultimate sign he was going to reach climax in a minute.

Graham pushed back, impaling himself on Hannibal's penis, and put his hand on Lecter's on his chest. The next thing he knew, Hannibal was spilling inside him, hot and quick and Graham could feel the man's pulsing and shivering behind him.

Lecter collapsed on the floor next to Will, whose orgasm was yet to come. Graham began stroking himself all over and moaned unbearably lying shoulder to shoulder with Hannibal, who laughed at the Omega's strong will.

Hannibal reached for Will and put his fingers inside the man, massaging and stroking and sliding in and out. He watched the grimace on the Omega's face and waited till he came, silent and happy, the muscle in his face and whole body relaxing.

The pleasant silence lasted ten good minutes. Then, Hannibal turned to look at Will who was not yet asleep but looking back at Lecter.

"I think it were the pills. Why I didn't come earlier." Will explained and felt a hand stroking his cheek.

"It's alright." Hannibal replied and kissed Will's forehead. "I want to know you, Will. I want to understand you. Will you let me?"

"It can be dangerous and exhaustive to understand." Graham said with a ghost of a laughter.

"I love a challenge."

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

soooo that's how i decided to resolve this
i hope it's a satifying ending to the story and that any mistakes or holes in the plot can be overlooked ^^
thanks to everyone who read and commented and left kudos <3
it was a nice way to come back :D

There was a particular sense of victory and freedom in the walk of shame Hannibal was taking at noon.

He had woken up on the floor, more tired than sated, but he didn't mind. Will had been gone, preparing breakfast from a few pieces of bread he had. It wasn't luxurious or rich like he'd have at home but when Will handed him a sandwich, he couldn't ask for anything else. He didn't care for breakfast and saw that neither did Will, whose pupils were blown and whose hunger could only be satisfied with something other than food.

They had sex again and after breakfast Hannibal watched Will work on the drawing, until he realised he had to be at the Palazzo at one. Lecter kissed Will, a kind that he had never experienced, and left.

On his way to work, Hannibal was wondering how he should deal with everything that had happened. Bedelia would never give up the money and she would not be easy to persuade into a divorce. There were very few options and Hannibal knew he could end up broke for the man he had barely knew. It couldn't compete with his marriage to Bedelia, who could always make him look good in her company and who could always come up with solutions to the worst problems.

Claiming Will as his property would not satisfy any of them and a sense of regret started to bud in Lecter. He had no plan he was following and he probably took one step too far.

Hannibal found the documents he had been looking for in the Palazzo and met with the curator. Establishing the details of the next exhibition took them some time and when Hannibal was leaving his workplace, the watch on his wrist was telling six.

Merely an hour after Hannibal had left the studio, someone opened the front door with a key and stepped inside. Will was relaxing on the couch and reading the morning paper, when he spotted a woman in the room. At first, he jumped, afraid of a burglar. Then, he thought of the many lovers Hannibal had had and assumed it might have been one of them.

The woman smiled at Will and looked around. She seemed to be searching for something. Or someone.

Graham realised he was only in his underwear and covered with a blanket. And the woman was an Alpha, that was certain. Yet, there was something about her, about the smile that wasn't exactly fake but not sincere either. Will tried to gather the pieces together.

"You're the wife, aren't you?"

Bedelia nodded.

"I got this bump thanks to you." Will pointed at his head and the woman smiled wider.

"Yes. May I sit down for a moment?"

"Sure. But I have to tell you that your husband isn't here."

"I'm not here to see him. I came to see you."

Will was partly surprised but in all honesty he had been also half-expecting that to happen.

"Do you want a glass of water?"

"Thank you."

In the moment of pause when Will was getting Bedelia something to drink, he was thinking of all the possible reasons why she came and what she was capable of. There was a sense of danger and uncertainty in her moves and the way she spoke. Or maybe it was only the feeling Will had and been used to having while around other people. Extreme empathy, that's what they called it.

The woman was sitting in an armchair and looking around the room, as if still looking for something. Will handed her the glass of water and sat on the couch where she had found him.

Bedelia drank slowly and seemed like she was tasting a wine. Her expression betrayed that there were many thoughts in her head.

"He's had many before you. He brings them here, offer drinks, paints them and God only knows what else. You're not the first."

Will considered the woman's words and detected the lie immediately. Hannibal had told him about his many lovers but the man had only brought to the studio those who he had truly wanted to paint. It was possible that no lover had ever lain on that floor, like he had. There was no bed in the studio and there was barely any alcohol. Bedelia was trying to make up a story that had no support in the facts.

"And you? Were you the first?" Will asked, his tone calm but the question was biting.

"If I am to be Bluebeard's wife, I would have preferred to be the only one."

“But you had the inconvenience of being chosen for him. The first one, never the only one.”

Will’s words must have stung but Bedelia acted calm, as if it didn’t leave a mark on her – the years she shared with her husband, the pain, the performance she had to give every time they went public. It also felt like a slap in the face because she realised her husband had told his lover all about their past and the circumstances of their marriage.

Wrinkles appeared on her forehead as she spoke.

“I know why he likes you. And I know you don’t like him for the same reason. You’re using him. You think he will leave me just like that and he will be with you. You think you’re going to regain your freedom. You don’t care about him.”

“He cares about me.”

“Does he?” Bedelia rubbed the wedding ring on her finger. “You don’t really want him. You want your independence. I know all about you, you little empath.”

There was a pause as Bedelia sipped the rest of the water in the glass.

“I can offer you freedom, real freedom. I can give you money, a place to stay, a new identity. As long as you take your pills and use some scent modifiers, you’ll be safe.”

“You’re very determined to keep him.” Will remarked but considered the woman’s offer.

“I could live my life alone and happy. Independent. But I find our symbiosis more effective.”

“And you’d lose if people found out that it was him who left you. With a new mate.”

Will knew at that moment that Bedelia couldn’t crush Hannibal. She was powerful as long as she was with him and any public conflict would result with her losing the reputation.

“You’re not his mate.”

“Not yet, I suppose.”

“I’m giving you twenty-four hours. Then, the deal is off the table.” Bedelia stated as she stood up, ready to leave.

“What are you going to do then?”

“Say no and you’ll see. You’d better say yes.”

The last words were uttered with a threatening tone and an intimidating smile.

Will was sitting in an armchair, dressed up in everything he owned, and waiting. He was more than ready to leave without a word. Bedelia seemed dangerous and desperate enough

for him to take her words lightly. There was only the small issue of not entirely clear feelings Will had for Du Maurier's husband.

The picture still on the canvas was reminding Will of the previous night and the following morning. There was fear and awareness in Graham that he was an Omega and he couldn't think straight when it came to an Alpha but at the mere thought of his saviour, Will's heart beat faster.

It was inconvenient for him that while fighting for his independence, Will had to resort to a man who saved his life but as long as he got what he wanted, he didn't mind the means.

A few minutes after seven, the lock in the front door turned and Will stirred in the chair. His chance of running away was thrown out of the window.

Hannibal stopped in the doorway upon seeing Will dressed and ready to go. It seemed like a moment of great confrontation was due. Will swallowed and stood up, bravely looking into Hannibal's eyes. Lecter took one step further, checking Will's reaction but there was none. Graham stood his ground and faced the other man.

"Are you running away?" Hannibal asked straightforwardly.

"Should I?"

The response was weak and Will cursed himself inwardly for sounding like he was not sure and waiting for Hannibal to tell him what he should do.

"Don't feel any obligations towards me. I feel responsible for you but if you don't think you need or want my help, I cannot make you stay."

"Do you want me to stay?"

Hannibal tilted his head significantly, emphasising that the question was not necessary and the answer was obvious.

"I have another question for you." Lecter said calmly. "Were you involved in your owner's death?"

The inquiry made Will uneasy and completely took him aback. His eyes widened in shock but then Graham took a deep breath.

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Were you?" That time Hannibal's tone was firmer and the man seemed determined to know the answer. There was no anger, though, only curiosity. "I ask because I may have an offer for you and it depends on your answer to my question."

Will almost fought the urge to chuckle. His eyes dropped to the floor for a moment.

"You know, your wife had an offer for me, too."

“Bedelia was here?” There was only a pinch of shock in Hannibal’s voice so it seemed he had expected that to happen, just as Will had.

“She’s quite a resourceful woman.”

“Yes.” Hannibal took off his coat and put it on the coach. He sat next to it, all the while keeping eye contact with Will. “What did she want?”

“That’s a stupid question.” Will smiled, genuinely amused.

Hannibal nodded and smiled as well. Then, his expression went more serious as the realisation of what that meant sank in.

“So…?” Lecter asked, obviously wanting to know what Will had decided. Fear had started to flicker in his eyes as he was afraid to believe that Will would reject him.

“Was it the first time?” Graham asked. He was wondering whether Bedelia visited all of Hannibal’s lovers and gave them the same ultimatum.

“To be completely honest, it was the second time. The first time I had an affair, it was sloppy. Bedelia found out and she would resort to about anything to end it. Then, we reached an agreement that we could have lovers but we still would have sex from time to time. Some sort of marital duty.” Hannibal chuckled and saw Will hold the laughter. “Then, I had a few affairs, some she knew about, some she didn’t. Everything behind closed doors, in a hotel room. I guess she got scared when she found out that I’m keeping you here.”

“So does that mean I’m not your typical lover?” Will asked, pleased.

“No.” A wide smile. “Definitely not.”

“I suppose she talked to you before she came here?”

“Yes.” Hannibal nodded.

“Didn’t she tell you that I’m using you?”

“Yes.” The smile disappeared from Hannibal’s face.

“And?”

“I would like to return to my initial question. Were you involved in your owner’s death?”

Will narrowed his eyes and considered Hannibal’s expression. The next gesture sealed the deal.

The apartment was empty and the lights were off. It was fairly late and the night was going to be cold. The sky was navy blue with small silver points and one bigger circle somewhere in the distance. A perfect night was due.

The only source of light in the apartment were the streetlamps outside. The yellowish light reflected on the silver surfaces of the knives.

The waiting seemed to last forever. Tension was palpable but a strange sense of calm and peace went through Hannibal's body. It was a moment of truth and a moment he could turn his life around. He could give Will his freedom back and regain his own.

The creaks in the floor behind the door were a sign for them to get ready. The door opened and a pale hand switched on the light.

"Welcome home." Hannibal uttered.

A huge blast woke up some people in the neighbourhood and the police arrived at the scene not long after. Two officers examined the scene while the fire-fighters put out the fire.

A car had crashed into a tree. The officers assumed that the driver had been going too fast and simply lost control over the vehicle. There was also a theory that there had been a wild animal which was spotted too late and in a failed attempt to swerve, the driver landed outside of the road.

The victim's body was almost completely burnt and it was impossible to recognise the person from seeing the face. In fact, there was no face.

After running the car's plates in the system, it turned out it belong to Hannibal Lecter.

The police officers arrived at Lecter's apartment sometime after two in the morning. It was late and if it was doctor Lecter in that car, his wife would be simply devastated but that would not depend on the hour of the day.

Du Maurier opened the door after a few knocks and frowned upon seeing the police at her doorstep. The men informed her about the accident and asked about her husband.

At first, she was sad and petrified but when she was brought to identify the corpse, she frowned even further. It definitely wasn't Hannibal's body. Yet, it was found in her husband's car. Bedelia considered that maybe it was Will. She couldn't possibly wrap her head around what had happened there and she wasn't exactly sure why but she confirmed that the corpse on the silver cold table was her husband.

If he wanted freedom – there, he got it.

From that day on, for almost a year, Bedelia wore mostly black clothes. She was a great actress and mourning Hannibal came very easily to her.

A few days after the funeral, the police got a notification about a disappearance of the director in the hospital for the mentally ill. The investigation was difficult and no one knew where Frederick Chilton could be.

When the policemen arrived at the Chilton's apartment, they found a small package on the doormat. Inside, there was a tape and a letter, which was immediately sent to the lab to be examined.

Knocking on the door was pointless as no one opened the door.

With a warrant, the policemen entered the flat and found no one. The wardrobe in the bedroom was emptied. There was a mess everywhere and it was clear the tenant left the apartment in a hurry.

After a complete and thorough search of the flat, the officers found nothing more.

After listening to the content of the tape, everyone was certain that doctor Chilton had fled the city. He had been blackmailed by Hannibal Lecter and in lack of possible moves, he decided to run away. The letter mentioned other copies of the tape and that the next one would appear if he didn't turn himself in.

The story seemed clear and the police were glad they didn't have to do much in the case. The life moved on.

"Wow, so they actually bought it."

"It was nicely staged. And Bedelia is a great actress."

"Life is a theatre."

"Was a theatre." Hannibal amended and opened the door for Will.

The man got inside the car and relaxed on the seat. He put the newspaper in the glove compartment and yawned.

"How far away are we?"

"Around forty kilometres till the border of the country." Lecter stated and started the engine in the car.

"Do you think they will figure it out eventually?"

"They closed the case and went for drinks. I don't think anyone is going to raise suspicion."

"I'll feel safe when we cross the border."

"Don't you feel safe already?" Hannibal asked with a fake tone of being offended.

"With you? No. I know what you're capable of." Will replied teasingly.

"I'm no more guilty of what you're accusing me of than you are of what I can accuse you of."

Will smiled when he saw Hannibal wink. He turned on the radio and enjoyed the sun on his face. After a few minutes, he felt a warm hand on his left knee and he thought he was dreaming.

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